

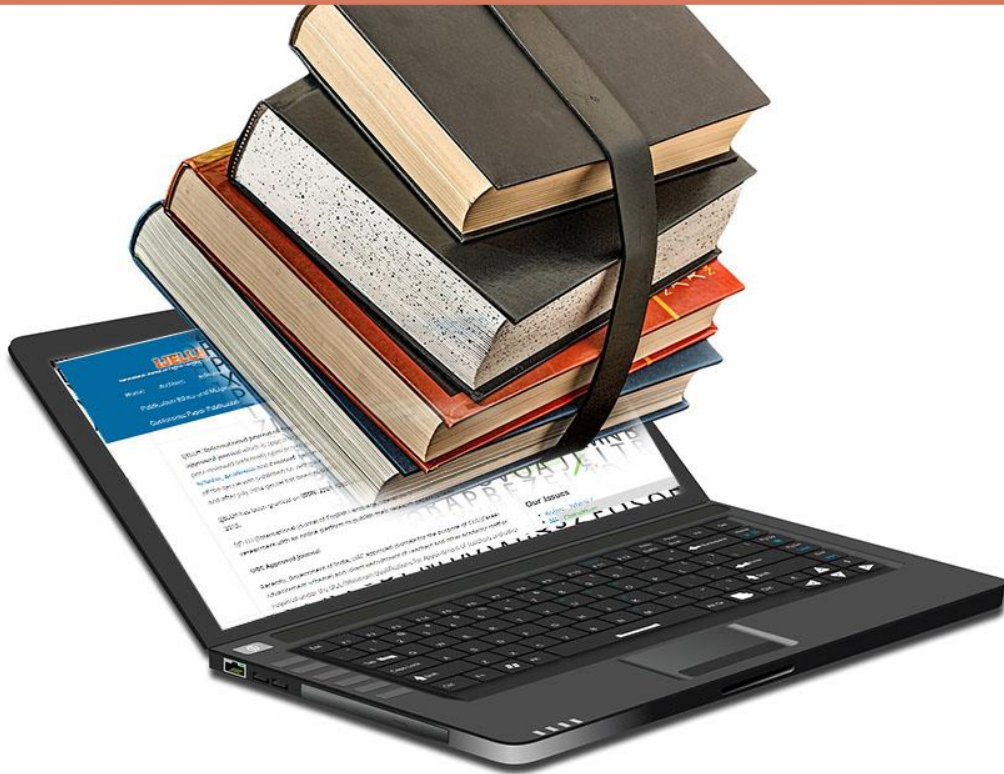
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Understanding Ergodic Literature through the Aesthetics of Hypertext

Abstract

Literature offers immense scope for absorbing the latest and the novel. Most of the literature and especially English Literature today is vividly available in the electronic form. Many new trends have evolved in the way we read literature. Today the perception towards reading literature has changed a lot due to the impact of digitization and this resulted in an innovation in literature reading. Of late electronic literature is considered to be an amalgamation of artistic texts produced for print media which are presented in electronic format and are also the texts which are produced for electronic media that could not be printed without losing essential qualities. Hypertext genre has become an essential component of electronic literature and is characterized by Hypertext links that provide a new context of non-linearity in literature and reader interaction. In this form of literature, the reader moves from one node of text to another node by simply clicking on the links and in due course arranges an in-depth story from a pool of stories. This can be applied to traditional texts too with internal references which can be equated to cyber links. The hypertext literature is in a way a kind of Ergodic literature. In Ergodic literature the reader has more

freedom to choose and decide on the actions of the plot compared to traditional literature that offers no such freedom or choices. My paper would be focusing on the emergence of Ergodic literature and its influence on conventional literature that marks a sort of uniqueness in the treatment and exploration of literature that has become a potent force in the field of Digital Humanities.

Key Words: Electronic Literature, Hypertext, Hypertext Links, Ergodic Literature and Digital Humanities.

As our lives become more networked, people are engaging more and more with structures. But they do not merely inhabit these structures – they are playing with them. [...] Systems only become meaningful as they are inhabited, explored and manipulated by people. In the coming century, what will become important will not be just systems, but *human* systems (Zimmerman 2009: 27).

The perception and study of English Literature has always been quite traditional and conventional. Technology has of-late changed our perceptions towards many a thing tremendously. Each and every field of study has been amazingly transformed and influenced by technology. Right from the approach to the appeal everything has been changing largely leaving us no choice but to update and upgrade our standards and perceptions. Literature is no exception and exemption to this mind blowing phenomenal change. Until now, the study of Literature happened in the most conventional way, but now we prefer to comprehend and evaluate it with an altogether different treatment and perception. This need has resulted in the evolution of the digitalization of Humanities and most appropriately has paved way for Ergodic Literature.

From Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature by Espen J Aarseth (1997) "During the cybertextual process, the user will have effectuated a semiotic sequence, and this selective

movement is a work of physical construction that the various concepts of "reading" do not account for. This phenomenon I call ergodic, using a term appropriated from physics that derives from the Greek words *ergon* and *hodos*, meaning "work" and "path." In ergodic literature, nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text. If ergodic literature is to make sense as a concept, there must also be nonergodic literature, where the effort to traverse the text is trivial, with no extranoematic responsibilities placed on the reader except (for example) eye movement and the periodic or arbitrary turning of pages."

Ergodic writing is a term instituted by Espen J. Aarseth in his book *Cyber text—Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, and is gotten from the Greek words *ergon*, signifying "work", and *hodos*, signifying "path". Ergodic fiction finally got to be understood as the path that requires work.

According to Aarseth's definition, in ergodic writing, nontrivial exertion is required to enable the reader to navigate the content. On the off chance that ergodic writing is to bode well as an idea, there must also likewise exist non ergodic writing, where the push to navigate the content becomes futile with no extranoematic obligations put on the reader's side in connection with like the eye development and the occasional or self-assertive turning of pages.

Cybertext is a subcategory of ergodic writing that Aarseth characterizes as writings that include count in their creation of scriptons. The way towards perusing printed matter, conversely, includes "minor" extranoematic exertion, that is, simply moving one's eyes along lines of content and turning pages. In this way, hypertext fiction of the straightforward hub and connection assortment is ergodic writing yet not cyber text. A non-inconsequential exertion is required for the reader to navigate the content, as the reader should continually choose which connect to take after, yet a connection, when clicked, will dependably prompt a

similar hub. A chat bot, for example, *ELIZA* is a cyber text in light of the fact that when the reader sorts in a sentence, the content machine really performs estimations on the fly that creates a printed reaction. The *I Ching* is moreover referred to for instance as cyber text on the grounds that it contains the rules for its own reading. The reader does the figuring yet the tenets are unmistakably implanted in the content itself.

One of the real advancements of the idea of ergodic writing is that it isn't medium-particular. New media analysts have tended to concentrate on the medium of the content, focusing on that it is for example paper-based or electronic. Aarseth broke with this fundamental supposition that the medium was the most critical refinement, and contended that the mechanics of writings require not to be medium-particular. Ergodic writing isn't characterized by medium, however by the route in which the content capacities. In this manner, both paper-based and electronic writings can be ergodic. According to Aarseth, the ergodic gem is one that in a material sense incorporates the principles for its own utilization. It is basically a work that has certain prerequisites worked out and it consequently differentiated between recognizes effective and ineffective users. Examples given by Aarseth include a diverse group of texts like wall inscriptions of the temples in ancient Egypt that are connected two-dimensionally (on one wall) or three dimensionally (from wall to wall or room to room); the *I Ching*; Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* in which the words of the poem "are spread out in several directions to form a picture on the page, with no clear sequence in which to be read"; Marc Saporta's Composition No. 1, *Roman*, a novel with shuffle able pages; Raymond Queneau's *One Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*; B. S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*; Milorad Pavic's *Landscape Painted with Tea*; Joseph Weizenbaum's *ELIZA*; Ayn Rand's play *Night of January 16th*, in which members of the audience form a jury and choose one of the two endings; William Chamberlain and Thomas Etter's *Racter*; Michael Joyce's *Afternoon: a story*; Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle's *Multi-User Dungeon* (aka

MUD1); and James Aspnes's *TinyMUD*. [citation needed] Some other contemporary examples of this type of literature are Nick Bantock's *The Griffin and Sabine Trilogy*, and *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski. All these examples require non-trivial effort from the reader, who must participate actively in the construction of the text.

The most well known and fulfilled novel perceived as ergodic is *House of Leaves* by Mark Z Danielewski. Numerous stories are displayed to the reader as unordered parts of content taking different arrangements. The story is there to discover, yet the reader needs to work to build it. The reader must be dynamic in the formation of the story, which at that point winds up plainly interactive. In any case, it doesn't become interactive in the actual sense of that word. The reader isn't collaborating through the minor gadget of choosing a way through an expanding storyline. This isn't a Choose Your Own Adventure amusement book, or an activity computer game with cut successions. Books as of now request a far more profound type of communication from the reader than unimportant plot elements. Books require the reader's creative ability to blossom in to presence as stories. Furthermore, ergodic writing works with, not against, the surviving interaction of all books.

However, ergodic content wrinkles the perusing knowledge in a way that can re-engage readers who may be upset with long hours of lecturing or address from a professor or a writer. All readers are usually drawn profoundly in with ergodic writings. On the present web we travel through a web work of blog entries, news articles, online networking statuses, explained images, video cuts, podcasts, discussion posts and remark strings. The test of developing an actually important account from this viably arbitrary flood of data is convincing to us. Our psyches and creative energies are currently wired for that profound communication without writings. Furthermore, it's the non-text perception that re-draws the reader's attention towards ergodic fiction or literature.

The concepts of cyber text and ergodic literature were of seminal importance to new media studies, in particular literary approaches to digital texts and to game studies. The emergence of this new phenomenon – digital literature – within the field of literary studies calls for the reorganization and creation of new theoretical and analytical repertoires. Since digital literature partakes of literary tradition as well as introduces critical medial and conceptual innovations that challenge the very concept of literary frontiers and spaces, its scholarly analysis demands significant reformulations in literary studies as models of communication change, and also as the reception and production processes accompanying these changes. Within these superbly altered scenarios, the study of Ergodic or Digital Literature is a response to the aesthetic and theoretical challenges brought on by the computer-based literature. As a methodological strategy, the study articulates recent trends in the theory of digital aesthetics – remediation, and eventilization, correlations of performativity, intermediality and interactivity with meaning-driven analysis.

Human-PC interface configuration is an issue of long development that has annoyed both programmers and artists. As per Brenda Laurel, the meaning of interface has changed from "the equipment and programming through which a human and a PC could impart" to the comprehensively incorporating idea of "the psychological and passionate parts of the client's involvement" with the objective of "engaging the users". Laurel's *The Art of Human-Computer Interface Design* is a collection of expert research based on the theme "user friendly," showcases a wide range of pragmatic issues pertaining to the field. In view of the topic of "easy to understand," exhibits an extensive variety of down to earth issues in the field. In contrast and the achievement of the product business, the utilization of interface plan in hypertext writing of the mid 90's can be for the most part viewed as lacking key creative energy as its aesthetic level being just preparatory of the initial order. According to Steven Johnson, authors and site architects and computerized craftsmen are merely occupied with

conjuring up the new punctuation and grammar concepts of connecting. As per Söke Dinkla, a few cases of intelligent craftsmanship from the second era as of now demonstrate that the ideas for planning the interface and with it the outline of the cooperation is getting increasingly unobtrusive and various. Be that as it may, the confinements still characteristic in the connection amongst hypertext and its innovative medium are precisely summed up in Michael Joyce's announcement, "... in the youthfulness of our mechanical age it is difficult to go too far" (referred to from Moulthrop 1997: [hgs0a8.html](#)). With not very many special cases, artistic hypertexts in this beginning period are normally message based stories of multi-linearity, the interface of which compliantly acquires the instrumental functionalities embraced by the product business. For instance, hyperlinks, likely a standout amongst the most captivating interface components, in such content based works are not really lifted from the fundamental capacity of connecting two lexias (text composed of blocks of text) to the field of imaginative transformation.

Ergodic literature and the new trends of it are to be thoroughly understood and read with altogether a different bent of mind as it is way ahead of the conventional reading. It suggests a new perception of study of the cyber-textuality that is a part of the Ergodic literature and in its horizons there are computer games, virtual realities and other massively programmed forms that also ensure the possibility of a new literature along-with the rest. Cyber-textuality, is not just about digital texts, but it is more likely the digital form that allows us much more freedom to textual functionality. There is a huge need for cybertext theory in the field of digital texts than in print text. So, keeping this view in mind cybertextuality is in short a perspective on all texts which in a limited sense refers to functional digital texts - this means that all digital texts are not necessary cybertexts (plain text files like in the Project Gutenberg archives, or, e-texts in pdf format are no more functional than average print texts). This new

perspective is still in experimentation stage and needs to be accepted with a free mind and spirit to be accepted as the new age literature of the digital era.

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